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16 NOV 1960

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Analysis Branch, DD/CN
FROM : Chief, Publications Staff, ORR
SUBJECT : Release of CIA/RR GM 60-4, South Vietnam,
12 October 1960, Secret, to Foreign Governments

1. It is requested that the attached copies of subject report be forwarded as follows:

#85 - #88
#89
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#98



2. All ORR responsibilities as defined in the DDI memorandum of 13 August 1952, "Procedures for Dissemination of Finished Intelligence to Foreign Governments," as applicable to this report, have been fulfilled.

13 Attachments

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AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 24/10/79 REVIEWER:

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Copy No. 243

GEOGRAPHIC INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CIA/RR GM 60-4
12 October 1960

SOUTH VIETNAM



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS

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With the intensification of Communist guerrilla and terrorist activities, internal security is again a primary problem of the government of South Vietnam. To date, this resurgence of violence is concentrated chiefly in the southern part of the country. It could spread to other areas, however, because much of the country offers an excellent environment for guerrilla warfare.

South Vietnam is comprised of the Mekong Delta, a coastal lowland, and a highland region. The roughly triangular and virtually flat delta, mainly facing out from the Mekong River measures some 300 miles along the South China Sea littoral from Pointe de Ca Mau to Baria. Most Phnom Penh, Cambodia, which is 170 miles inland, the delta is only about 25 miles wide. At Phnom Penh it is 100 miles wide, and at the mouth of the delta it is 300 miles wide. The delta is a mile. Although the relief of the delta would not restrict movement in the area, the intricate drainage network of deep, wide streams and canals and the extensive mangrove swamps, which are flooded during the rainy season, would restrict movement. During these circumstances, slightly higher landforms -- including beach ridges and natural levees along the rivers -- stand out as dry ground above surrounding inundated areas. Settlements and roads tend

The coastal lowland, extending northward from the delta plain, varies in width from 5 to 30 miles. In places the seaward edge of the lowland is bordered by belts of sand dunes several miles wide, with dunes that may be more than 300 feet high. Spurs and outliers of the highlands, such as the Bon Gué spur that forms Cap Varella, encroach upon the lowland and form natural defense lines against mass troop movements along the coast. The spurs and outliers, however, also present potential avenues of ingress to the interior uplands for small guerrilla units that might be landed in the sheltered bays and anchorages along the coast. Where the highlands extend to the sea, many such sheltered landing areas are found between the promontories and the steep rocky islands offshore.

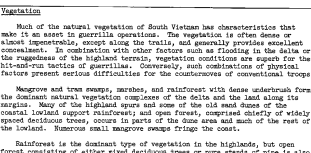
Between the coastal lowland and the Mekong Valley lies the highland region. It extends from the southern end of the Annam Mountain Chain, just northeast of the Mekong Delta, northwest into North Vietnam. North of the latitude of Qui Nhon the highlands are comprised predominantly of steep mountain ridges with intervening deep, narrow valleys. The mountains are high, rugged, however, is a complex of mountain ranges and scattered plateaus, including the Bialat and Koutum (Djarai). The mountains, with some peaks over 8,000 feet, and the deeply incised parts of the plateaus make surface transportation difficult.

South Tierras has a tropical monsoonal climate with distinct wet and dry seasons. For much of the country the hot, humid wet season lasts from June to September and the dry season of predominantly clear, relatively cool days from October into May. The Andean Mountain Chain, however, forms a significant barrier to the prevailing winds and the rain-bearing clouds. The result is that the joining coastal lowlands have their greatest rainfall during the fall and winter.

Annual rainfall varies considerably throughout the country. Heights has about 70 inches, but in places where the mountains rise precipitously from the coastal lowlands -- such as Ba Na, a few miles inland from Hanoi -- the annual rainfall is more than 100 inches. The coastal lowlands of the Gulf of Tonkin at Washington, D.C., is 41 inches. Whereas Saigon receives 75 percent of its rainfall during the summer, Ba Na on the eastern side of the climatic divide receives 75 percent of its rainfall during the winter. The south-south-west monsoon in the highlands west of the climatic divide might be feasible, but the south-south-east monsoon east of the divide would be increasingly difficult because of the rainy season.

The heavy rains, the resultant flooding, and the combination of high temperature and humidity have both physical and psychological effects on personnel involved in operations during the rainy season. Whereas this season is generally favorable for guerrilla warfare, the rains materially increase the problem of logistical support for conventional military forces.

Although they vary considerably with elevation, temperatures at any one location are relatively uniform throughout the year, ranging from moderate to high. The mean annual temperature in Saigon is about 80°F whereas in DaLat, at an elevation of about 5,000 feet, it is only 65°F.



and are particularly extensive on the Djiring and Dalat Plateaus. The deciduous open forests partially cover some of the plateaus and lower slopes on the leeward side of the mountains, where rainfall is relatively light. Grasslands occur on the plateaus and on some of the hillsides.

The total population of almost 13 million, about 11 million are Vietnamese. The remaining 2 million are large minority groups - 700,000 or more Chinese, 450,000 Chakchaks, and 680,000 of 16 major tribal groups - as well as relatively small numbers of Thais, Malaysians, Indians, Pakistanis, Europeans, and Americans.

The distribution of the major ethnic groups, except the Chinese, is shown on Map 59011. Of the total Chinese population, about 550,000 are concentrated in the coastal cities Sihanoukville and Choeul. Most of the Vietnamese live in the lowland region. The tribal peoples such as the Ede and Jaks occupy the highlands, where they form 71 percent of the population. The Chakchaks live in the highlands, but are significantly, as the settled in all of the provinces bordering Cambodia from the north and west.

The government of South Vietnam under President Diem has long anticipated Communist subversive activities in the rural areas. His attempts to prevent Communist penetration of these rural wall spots have included the establishment of loyal villages (his "barren wall") through (1) the settlement in these rural areas in 1955 of some of the 800,000 refugees from North Vietnam (2) the recruitment of local peasants to the government army and (3) the present agrarian program, which attempts to incorporate small isolated villages into larger ones for greater security (see inset on Map S5012). Existing roads, canals, and airstrips are being improved and new ones are being constructed to KUMUANG.

Vietnamese (Annamese) is the chief language, serving all the Vietnamese as a primary tongue. It also serves, as does French, as a *lingua franca* among many of the minority peoples. The Chinese speak various dialects, principally Cantonese and Mandarin, and the Chinese are also spoken by a large number of the Vietnamese and some of the Chinese in the same area. The various tribal peoples use languages from the Mon-Khmer and Melayo-Polynesian linguistic stocks. From 4 to 10 distinct and often mutually unintelligible dialects may be spoken within each tribal group. Because of the complex language situation, multilingualists

The religions of South Vietnam are both diverse and eclectic. The dominant religion is Buddhism, adhered to by most of the Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cambodians. The majority of the Buddhists, however, follow the Confucian ethical system in their daily lives and are also spirit worshipers. The largest non-Buddhist religious group is Roman Catholic, with 1,200,000 members, but other groups include about 75,000 Protestants, 50,000 Muslims, and 20,000 Hindus. Although several thousand are nominal Christians, the highland tribal people are especially animist. Vietnamese religions also include two indigenous sects: the Cao Dai, an extremely eclectic group, and the Hoa Hao, a "reformed sect of Buddhism."

South Vietnam is predominantly an agricultural country. Rice is the major crop, growing in over 7.5 million acres (including double-cropping acreage). Seventy-five percent of the rice comes from the delta (double-cropping acreage). "rice bowls" of Southeast Asia. Planting takes place between July and September, and the rice is harvested from November through February. After the monsoon rains begin. In the coastal lowland the life of the rice harvester varies with the weather. In the dry season, the rice harvester and his family harvest and the harvesting period may extend from April through February.

In the highland region, many of the tribes practice primitive "sw" agriculture -- slash-and-burn clearing of wooded areas that are then used for unimproved cultivation of rice during the rainy season. The rice is harvested sometime in the middle of the rainy season. The rice is harvested as a subsistence rice harvest with other crops such as sweet potatoes and maize. Hunting, gathering, and gathering of forest products such as casta (cinchona) bark supplement the rice harvest.

Industrial activity is limited but is expanding steadily. New enterprises such as pharmaceutical and plastic industries have been added to such traditional ones as rice milling and lumbering. Mining is dominated by the limited production of the Mong-Hon coal mines.

Although the government of South Vietnam is actively engaged in road building, transportation facilities in much of the country are inadequate, particularly during the rainy season. Landslides, washouts, and -- in the delta region -- general inundation may greatly restrict travel on many of the roads during periods of heavy rain. The main artery, the Ho Chi Minh Highway, goes from Hanoi and Haiphong to the south, and is the main artery for the country. The road system extends along the tracks and trails only by animals or coolies. The rail system of South Vietnam consists primarily of the single-track meter-gauge line extending northward along the coastal lowland from Saigon to Dong Ha, near the demarcation line. A main branch connects the coastal line with Dalet, in the highland region. (See Map 29012 and Transportation Notes for the location of roads.)

In the delta area the waterways, both natural and man-made, are of prime importance to transportation. The extensive network of rivers and canals is used by steamships, junks, and sampans. These important arteries of commerce and communications in the Mekong Delta also provide potential channels of infiltration by junks that reportedly sail from North Vietnam with Viet Minh agents.

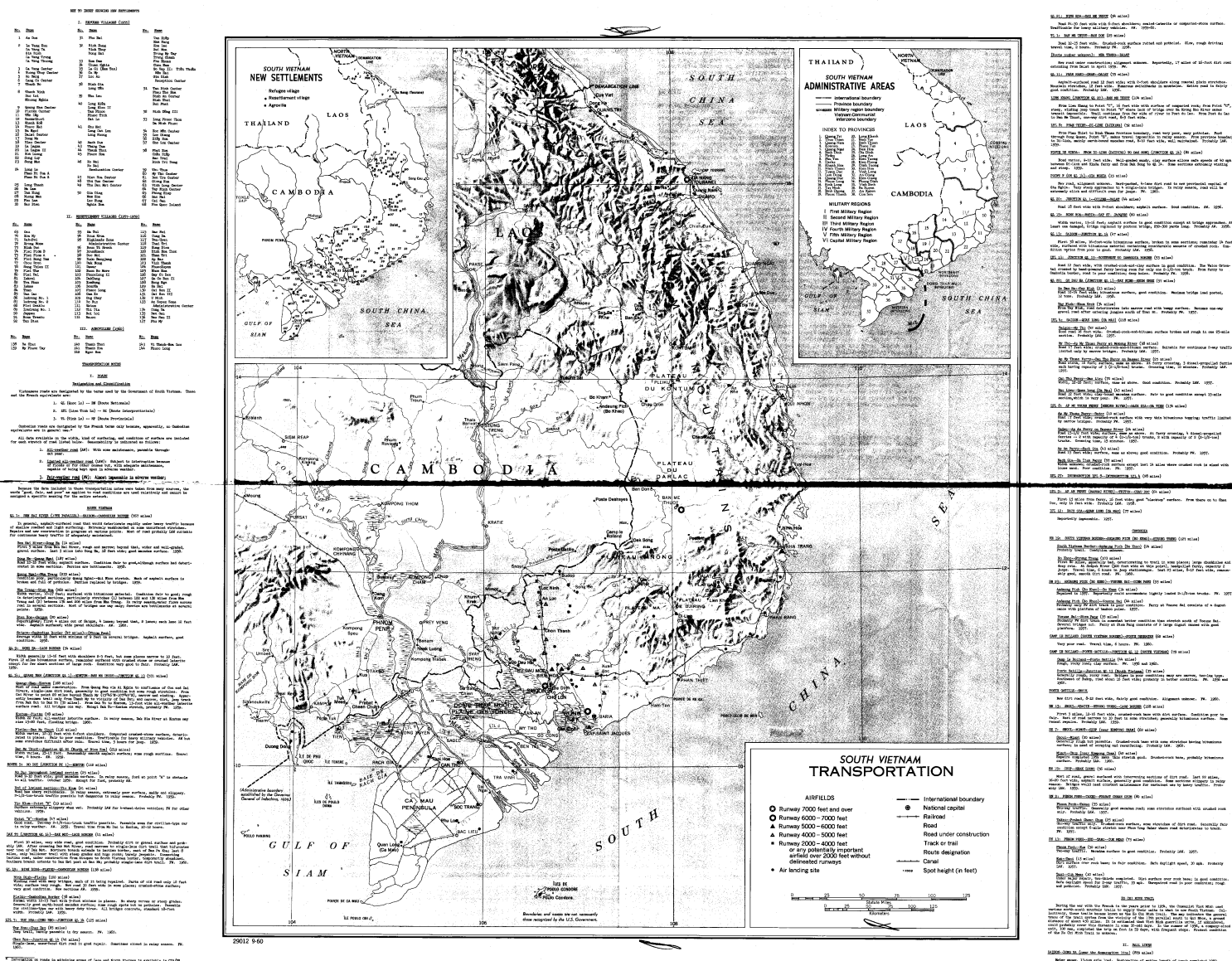
possibility of ashfall along some of the roads enhances the desirability of air travel in Vietnam. Reportedly, there are some 40 unbric airfields with runways of 2,500 feet or more. Probably fewer than one-third of them are used by civil air services or the South Vietnam Air Force; the remainder generally are small fields owned by plantation companies. Air travel may be restricted by the seasonal monsoons, by heavy smoke from "rai" burnings, or by the haze conditions that precede the rainy season.

Geographic Aspects of Internal Security

Ever since the 1954 partition of Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Communist North Vietnam) has made clear its intention of eventually uniting under its control the two parts of the country. The present terrorist activities in South Vietnam by the Viet Cong, the paramilitary arm of the North Vietnam Communist Party, constitute a tactic in its campaign to achieve this end.

The choice of the Mekong Delta for the major concentration of the current Viet Cong activities is influenced by such factors as (1) the location of the delta adjacent to Cambodia, where adjoining border areas offer refuge for Communist guerrillas; (2) the presence of a large, fertile, and especially well-watered area, which is well suited to guerrilla warfare; (3) the lack of a good transport network which isolates many of the people from the government at Saigon; and (4) the status of the delta as the major rice-surplus area of all Vietnam, having an annual surplus of some 350,000 tons. An intimidated or a sympathetic peasantry on the delta could provide enough food to sustain large groups of guerrillas, whereas the highland tribesmen, who live in small, isolated communities, can produce more than is required for subsistence, leaving little or no surplus.

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